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ABSTRACT

Five group building and cooperative learning activities for the early childhood classroom are provided. The activities are designed to help create a positive, interactive classroom environment. Introductory comments provide a rationale for using cooperative activities with children. Lesson plans list objectives and materials needed, describe procedures, and offer guidelines for student practice, closure, and lesson evaluation. (RH)

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Using Cooperative Learning in the Early Childhood Classroom

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Introduction

In the Early Childhood/Primary Years, the young child is self-centered and interested in personal gratification. The goal of educators is to move that self-centered child to an awareness of the needs of others through interaction with other young children. Educators develop activities that involve taking turns with other children, sharing with other children, and caring for other children. These activities are meant to provide the same type of outcomes as Cooperative Learning.

As young children become aware of the needs of other children, educators provide more structured activities which promote cooperation among children. One of the most consistent research findings relating to Cooperative Learning is that Cooperative Learning activities increase the liking of one student for another student. This liking of peers is especially noted in the relationships between socioeconomic groups, ethnic groups, and racial groups. In other words, artificial barriers are broken down through cooperative small group activities.

Affective Benefits

Two affective benefits of Cooperative Learning have application for the Early Childhood/Primary Years. These two benefits are improved behavior and increased liking for others. Much of the research on Cooperative Learning has dealt with older students. However, Cooperative Learning should be of interest to educators dealing with younger children in preschool and in primary classrooms. Cooperative Learning, also, encourages group interaction and positive social participation.

Cooperative Learning in the child's early years promotes positive feelings toward school, teachers, and other students. These factors help build the basis for further success in the later years of schooling. When the young child begins to attempt and complete readiness tasks, cooperation is desirable. This cooperation provides opportunities for the young child to share ideas and learn how other children think. Cooperation, also, provides the young child with situations that allow for reactions such as in problems of getting along with other children. In addition, oral language skills can be developed in the small Cooperative Learning group setting.

A song can be sung cooperatively. Students could sing "Daddy's Taking Us to the Zoo". Different groups of students could sing about different animals in the zoo that are mentioned in the song. Individual students would sing only during their assigned portion of the song. The groups would sing about different specific animals. The song would provide students with the opportunity to sing as a team and yet learn to wait their turn for their part of the song.

According to Glasser (1986), a student's motivation to function at school depends upon the extent to which the student's basic psychological needs are met. Cooperative Learning increases a young child's motivation by providing help from other children - all of whom are facing the same needs and stresses of beginning the educational process. The learning team approach for the young child provides a basis of success and support that would not necessarily be present in the traditional classroom. The young child must learn to cooperate in the learning team since that team is structured for cooperation in the completion of a group task.

Cooperative Learning helps students at every academic level to feel successful and productive in the classroom. In the learning teams, the low-achieving student can still make contributions to the successful completion of group activities. By being a part of the group and assisting the group, the low-achieving student experiences success. At the same time, all the young children in the group are becoming successful in expressing themselves to other children. They increase their own understanding of their own ideas by being required to explain those ideas to others in the group. This form of oral rehearsal allows each young child to be heard and listened to during group interaction which is appropriate to the young child's age level.

Several components of Cooperative Learning as described by Johnson and Johnson (1984) are complimentary to the goals of early childhood/primary education. The educator structures a task that all the members of the cooperative learning group must be involved in. The task cannot be completed without every member of the group participating. This is known as positive group interdependence. Each child must rely on every other child yet be accountable for individual actions within the group. The educator teaches the young children specific skills of interpersonal relationships and group maintenance. These skills are then applied within each learning group. These skills are needed in order to insure the success of the group on a specific educational task and to insure the growth of the young child in social interactions.

Cooperative Learning has been shown to improve the social relationships among students of different ethnic groups. Slavin comments that "Not surprisingly, the cooperative learning classroom studies have found quite consistently that students express greater liking for their classmates in general as a result of participating in a cooperative learning method...." (Slavin, 1987, 22) In the traditional classroom for older students, competition and individual learning have been stressed. However, when these older students are in cooperative learning groups, cooperative tasks are assigned. The individual student's learning is assessed individually. Any rewards are given to the group on the basis of the group's performance. Often with older

students, the change to cooperative learning processes is difficult to accomplish because of the years of competitive and individual learning approaches. By beginning to teach group participation skills from the moment the young child begins to come into a structured learning setting, the foundation for success in later learning is laid (Lyman & Foyle, in press).

Educators of the early childhood/primary years have the first opportunity to structure Cooperative Learning experiences for students. These experiences and activities can be the same ones that currently are in use to encourage cooperation and interaction. In order to increase the probability of the young child's success in later schooling, the educator of young children needs to provide positive group building experiences for the young child and to adapt current activities to a Cooperative Learning method.

Group Builders

Group building involves students in planned activities that embody the requirements of successful cooperative learning. Group builders are any group activity that helps a group of people become cohesive or any group activity that helps to maintain the group's cohesiveness. Group builders are designed so that participants experience success, develop positive attitudes and build a foundation for further successful cooperation. In order to promote and sustain successful collaboration and cooperation, group building activities are necessary at the beginning and throughout a group's working relationship.

There are a wide variety of group building activities that provide the young child with cooperative social interaction skills. The following group building and Cooperative Learning activities can help to provide a positive interactive classroom environment.

ACTIVITY ONE: Four-in-a-Row

Objectives: Given a list of characteristics, group members will identify characteristics which apply to them and to other members of their group.

Participants will appreciate the qualities of other group members.

Participants will experience success by contributing to the group effort.

Materials: One activity sheet per group
One writing instrument per group

Procedure: Members of the large group are regrouped by the leader into groups of four. Three member groups are acceptable if the group does not divide evenly into four. Groups are to read each characteristic and write the names of group members to which the characteristic applies in the square. Depending upon the age of the children, the teacher may wish to read the items and write the children's names on their sheets. The goal is to have a line of four squares, up and down, across, or diagonal, in which the name of at least one group member is written.

eaten food from a fast food restaurant	driven or ridden in a car with 4 doors	trimmed your fingernails or toenails	talked with your brother or sister
chewed a piece of sugarless gum	watched a sporting event on TV	petted a dog or cat	played a musical instrument
attended church or a religion class	recycled an aluminum can	played a computer game	read at least one chapter of a fiction book
drew or doodled on a piece of paper	visited a shopping mall or center	ridden a bicycle or exercise bicycle	worn a shirt or sweatshirt with words on it

ACTIVITY TWO: Making a Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich

ANTICIPATORY SET:

Read the book The Giant Jam Sandwich. Discuss what you would need to make a sandwich, such as peanut butter and jelly.

MAIN OBJECTIVE:

The learner will be aware of the importance of following directions while thinking logically and sequentially in order to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

DIVISION OF STUDENTS:

The teacher will assign four different jobs to each group. Each group will be responsible for making a sandwich. A second group will be responsible for distribution of the finished product, plus other related snack items.

INTERACTION:

1. Division of labor
2. a. Demonstrate job
   b. Students name jobs

JOB NAME	JOB DESCRIPTION
Baker	Brings supply tub to group. Opens and removes bread from package.
Spreader	Spreads the peanut butter
Jammer	Spreads the jelly
Slicer	Puts bread slices together in sandwich form and cuts it into 4 pieces.
TABLE HELPERS:	
Mouth Cleaner	Passes out napkins
Cow Drinker	Passes out milk
Sipper	Passes out straws
Munchy Muncher	Passes out sandwiches

INPUT:

As a whole group, have students give verbal directions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Write the directions on chalk board or chart paper. When completed, the teacher makes the sandwich according to the directions. (If the students said put peanut butter on the jelly, then put the jar of peanut butter on the unopened package of bread, etc.) Talk about the importance of thinking logically, doing things in sequential order, and following directions. Pass out job necklaces to four students, assigning one of the sandwich roles to each student. Ask the rest of the class to restate the directions for the sandwich in a logical and sequential order.

GUIDED PRACTICE:

Have four students come up to be role models. Assign jobs and have them put on corresponding necklaces. Talk to the entire class about the importance of thinking logically, doing things in sequential order, and following directions. Discuss safety rules when opening the jars of food, and the proper way to use a knife. Ask the class to restate the directions. Write the new directions, as each task is performed by one of the students in the role model group. Compare the two sets of directions, and demonstrations that were performed.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE:

Have the entire class move into their cooperative learning groups of four. Each group is given four necklaces. The job pictures include: peanut butter jar; jelly jar; slice of bread, knife. Each group member has previously been assigned a number (1-4). The teacher assigns a number to each picture. The students can then determine what their job will be, and begin making their sandwich. (All supplies have previously been placed in a tub. The supplies included: a small container of peanut butter, jelly, 2 slices of bread, plastic knife, and a sheet of waxed paper.)

CLOSURE:

If you have table helpers, each helper can be assigned a job to distribute snacks. These jobs could be randomly assigned by teacher. Use job necklaces to assign roles. Another variation would be to tape on or pass out the four different jobs to each group of four. Stick puppets can be made for each picture. Each puppet can be held up, one at a time, and everyone with that job can come and pick up four of each item and pass them out to their table group. These items were also in separate tubs.

EVALUATION:

1. Verbal responses from the students.

2. Make a word web using vocabulary words: peanut butter, jelly, knife, bread, spread, and so on (see web picture).

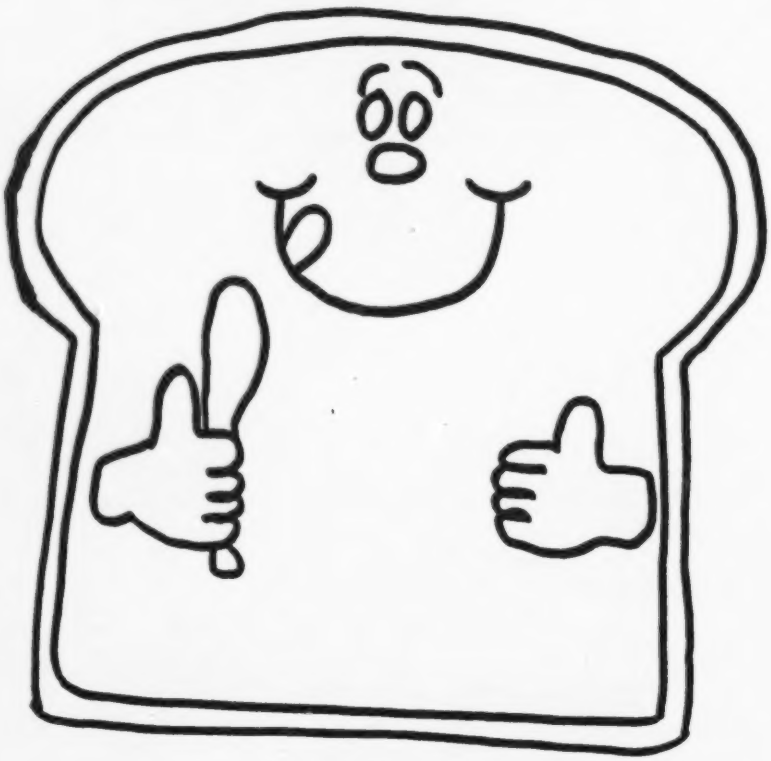
3. Review the directions comparing the first time, to the second time.

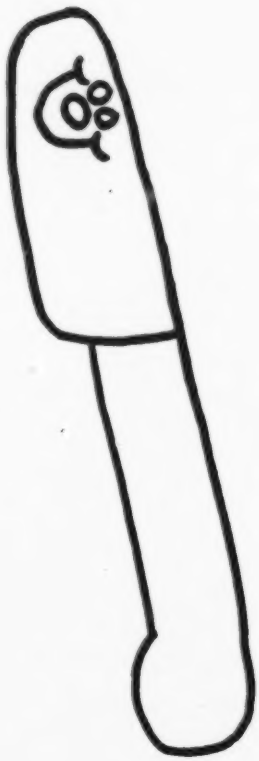
4. Discuss how important it is to follow directions, not only during this lesson, but always.

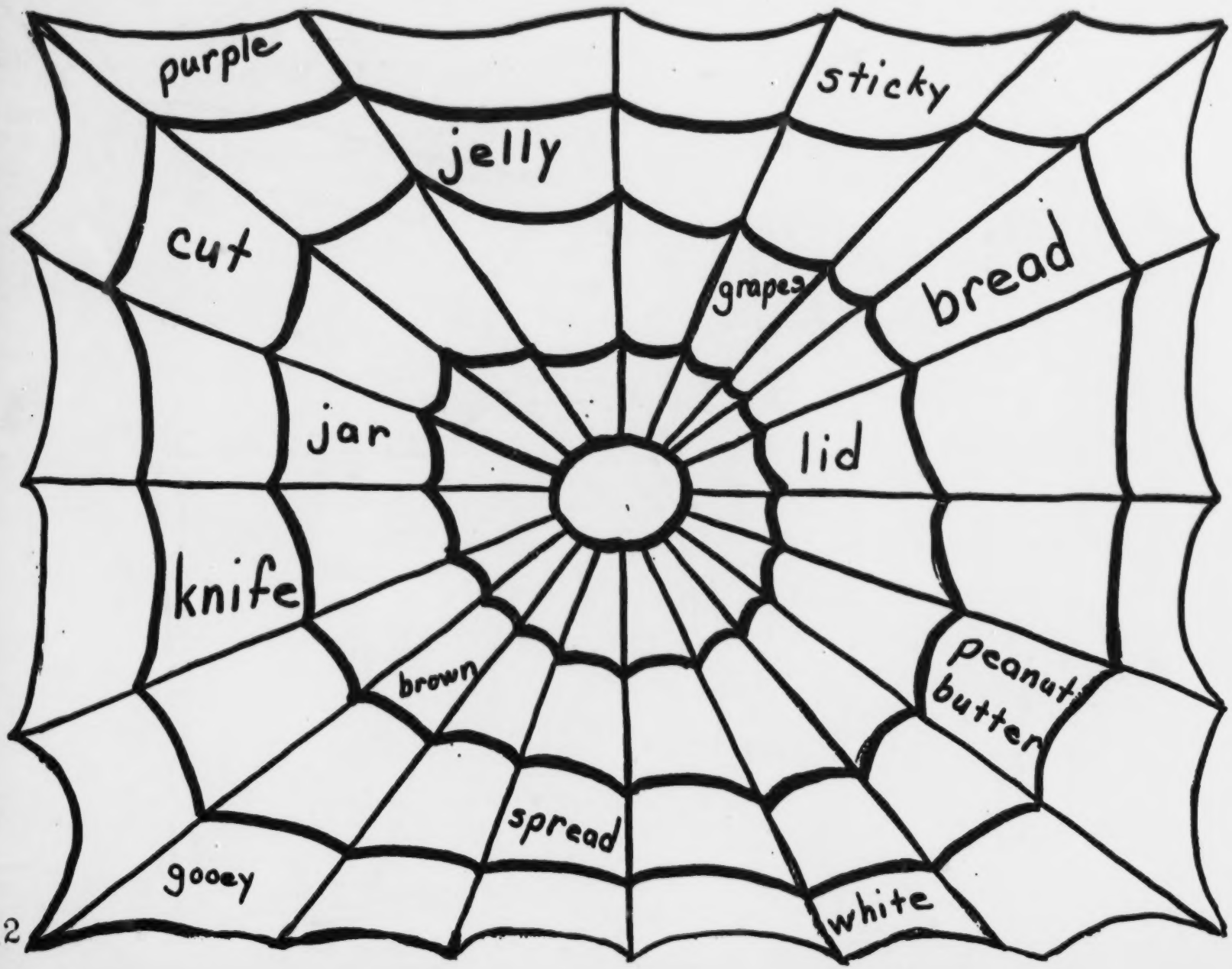
5. Ask how the students liked their sandwich.

NOTE:

This activity was done originally during the week of Halloween. The food products and equipment were renamed using Halloween vocabulary words. In addition, the directions were sent home for the parents to enjoy also.





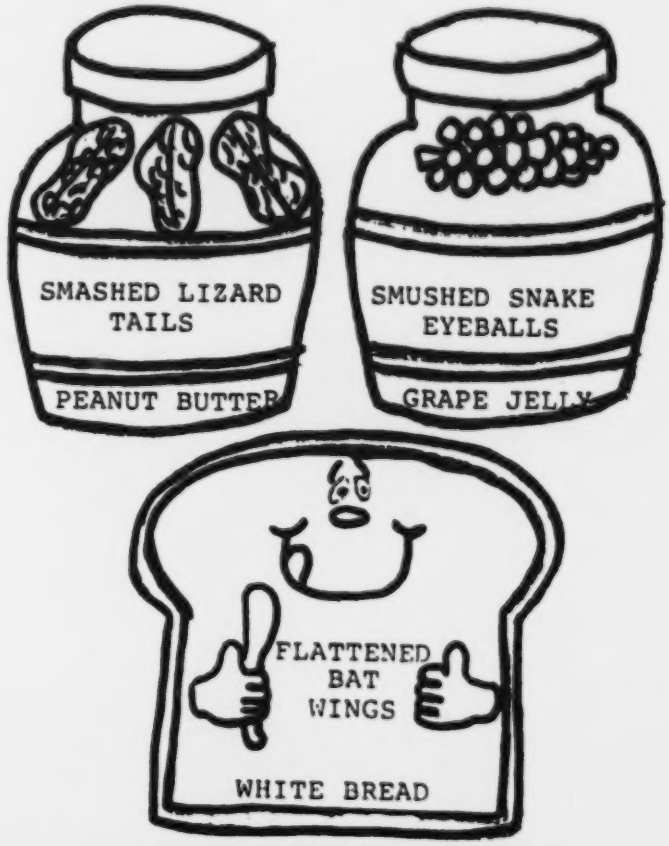

purple
jelly
sticky
cut
grapes
bread
jar
lid
knife
brown
peanut butter
spread
gooey
white

Halloween
Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwiches

How to make flattened bat wing, smashed lizard tails, and smushed snake eyeball sandwiches.

1. Get the bread out.
2. Get the jelly out.
3. Get the peanut butter out.
4. Next you do the jelly, peanut butter, and bread.
5. Put the jelly on the bread.
6. Spread the peanut butter on.
7. Spread the jelly on.
8. Peanut butter----spread it.
9. Get another piece of bread out and put it on the piece of bread you just made.
10. Put jelly on it.
11. Put peanut butter on it.
12. Eat it!

NOTE: This is a dictated recipe for making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on white bread by Mrs. Morehead's afternoon kindergarten class. The names of the food products were altered to give it a Halloween theme. (10-26-89)



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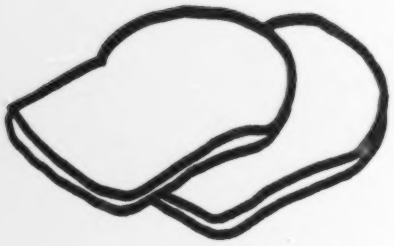
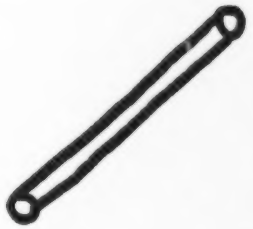
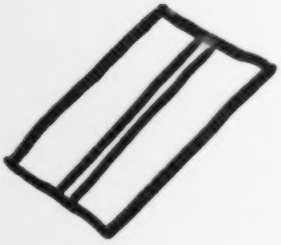
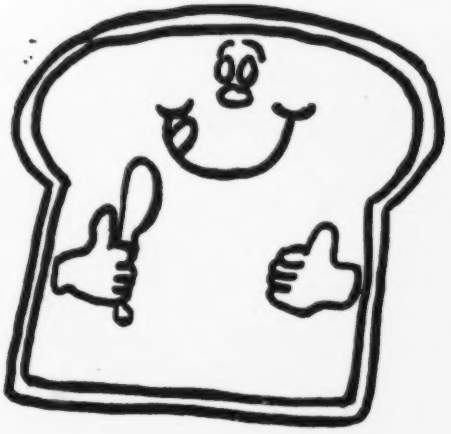








ACTIVITY THREE: Where's Your Triangle? Using Pattern Blocks

ANTICIPATORY SET:

Show a giant colored picture of an original design made with pattern block shapes.

MAIN OBJECTIVE:

The learners will make one original design using colored pattern blocks, and decide on one predetermined shape to identify to the teacher.

DIVISION OF STUDENTS:

The teacher will assign four different roles to each group. Each group member will be responsible for using their own assigned colored pattern block to contribute to the groups cooperative design. The pre-determined block can be used by any group member.

INTERACTION:

1. Division of labor
    a. Demonstrate jobs
    b. Children name jobs

JOB NAME	JOB DESCRIPTION
Orange Four Pointer	Adding orange square to design Blue
Sparkler	Adding blue diamond to design
Yellow Stop Sign	Adding yellow hexagon to design
Red Trapper	Adding red trapezoid to design

INPUT:

Tell students that they will be taking turns to make an original design using the four different pattern blocks. When their design is complete, they are to cooperatively decide on one green triangle within their design to be identified to the teacher. Instruct students to sort pattern blocks, according to their individual shape. They will take turns adding either their assigned shape, or a green triangle to the design. After approximately ten minutes, the teacher announces for each group to make their decision about the one green triangle. EVERYONE IN THE GROUP MUST AGREE ON THE SAME GREEN TRIANGLE PATTERN BLOCK.

GUIDED PRACTICE:

Have four students come up randomly to be role models. Have them place one of the four pattern block necklaces around their neck. The teacher gives them some pattern blocks, and ask them to sort them by color, according to their individual job. When they are all sorted, they will have one pile of green triangles. These can be used in place of the assigned block during an individuals turn. Students rotate turns. On the back of each necklace card is a number, 1-4, which indicates the order of play. After a few minutes, the teacher asks the group to decide on their triangle, which they all point to.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE:

After this demonstration is completed, have the entire class move into their cooperative learning groups of four. Each group is given a necklace, and determines their job, and order of play. This game can be played several times by having group members exchange necklaces within their individual group of four. It is best to limit the time to not more than ten minutes per game.

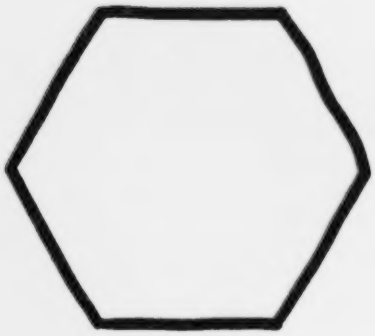
CLOSURE:

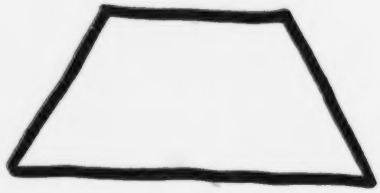
Have groups identify the one green triangle within their original design.

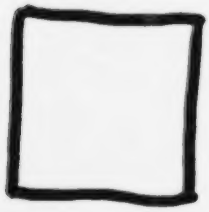
EVALUATION:

1. Ask groups how they came to their decision about the one green triangle.

2. If the students played the game a second time (or more), find out why and/or how they chose their new color/ pattern block.







ACTIVITY FOUR: Jelly Making

Initial Setting

Centers are set up around the outside edges of the room on counters, tables, or desks. These centers are the work areas for each table group. Each table area is numbered. The sugar and pectin locations are labeled since these items so closely resemble each other.

Procedure

1. Students are put in groups of 4 (3 may be used).

2. The students then determine how to rotate jobs. Numbering off - 1, 2, 3, and 4 - works well.

3. Students put a number tag tied with a loop of yarn around their necks so that each student easily identifies who is number 1 and so on. Four different colors of yarn should be used so that each number 1, 2, 3, and 4 are also identified by differing colors of yarn.

4. Students whose numbers are called will work on the Jelly Making project. The #1 student from each group will come forward when #1 is called by the teacher. All other students will be working at their desks on other assignments.

5. Students who are numbered "1" come to the sink and measure 1/2 cup of water and put it in a large plastic cup (substitute for bowl). Students check the appropriate box on the Jelly recipe.

6. Students who are numbered "2" get the cup from the number "1"s and go to the pectin area and measure 2 tablespoons of pectin.

7. Students numbered "2" take the pectin to their assigned work center. Students numbered "3" take a turn to stir well and check the box on the "Jelly recipe" sheet when finished.

8. In 15 minutes, the students numbered "4" go to the center and stir the mixture and check the box.

9. After another 10 minutes (total of 25 minutes to this point), the "1"s go to stir the mixture again and check the box.

10. After 15 minutes, the "2"s go to stir for the last time and check the box.

11. At the same time as step 10, the "3"s go to the sink area and measure 3 tablespoons of grape juice into a second cup and check the box.

12. The "4"s take the cup of grape juice to the sugar table, add 1/2 cup of sugar. They take the mixture to the center and stir the mixture well and check the box.

13. The "1"s and "2"s get the water and pectin mixture from the center, go to the sugar area and add 1/4 cup plus 3 tablespoons of sugar, check the box, stir the mixture, and check the box.

14. With all the students at their centers, the "3"s pour the juice mixture (purple colored) into the clear pectin mixture. The "4"s stir the combined mixture well and check the box.

15. The "1"s pour an amount of the mixture as evenly as possible into 4 small containers (one for each of the group's members). Clear plastic juice glasses were used.

16. Students cover the mixture with plastic wrap and put a rubber band around the top in order to hold the plastic wrap in place. The mixture is allowed to stand and solidify.

17. The resulting grape jelly could be taken home as a present for a holiday season, used as a breakfast treat on toasted bread, or used as jelly on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

Jelly Recipe

1. Put 1/2 cup water in a bowl. ..... ☐

2. SLOWLY add 2 tablespoons powdered pectin, ... ☐
stirring well.

3. Let the mixture stand for 45 minutes, ☐ ☐ ☐
stirring 3 times or frequently.

4. Put 3 tablespoons frozen grape juice concentrate ..... ☐
in a second bowl.

5. Add 1/2 cup sugar. Stir well, but don't expect ..... ☐
the sugar to dissolve.

6. When the water and pectin mixture is ready, add ..... ☐
1/4 cup plus 3 tablespoons of sugar.

Stir until the sugar dissolves ..... ☐

7. Add the juice mixture to the pectin mixture. ..... ☐
Stir well until all the sugar dissolves.

8. Pour into 4 small containers. It will be
solid within minutes.

ACTIVITY FIVE: Easter Egg Mobile

Objective: Students will practice cutting and the use of fine motor skills while cooperatively designing an Easter egg.

Grouping:

Students are placed into groups of three. Each group is given a copy of the Easter egg. Students are assigned numbers (1, 2, 3) by the teacher.

Cutting Task:

Student #1 begins cutting out the egg. After a short interval of time, student #2 should have a turn cutting out some of the lines inside the egg. Student #3 should cut the remaining lines inside the egg. All students should have approximately the same amount of time to cut as others in the group.

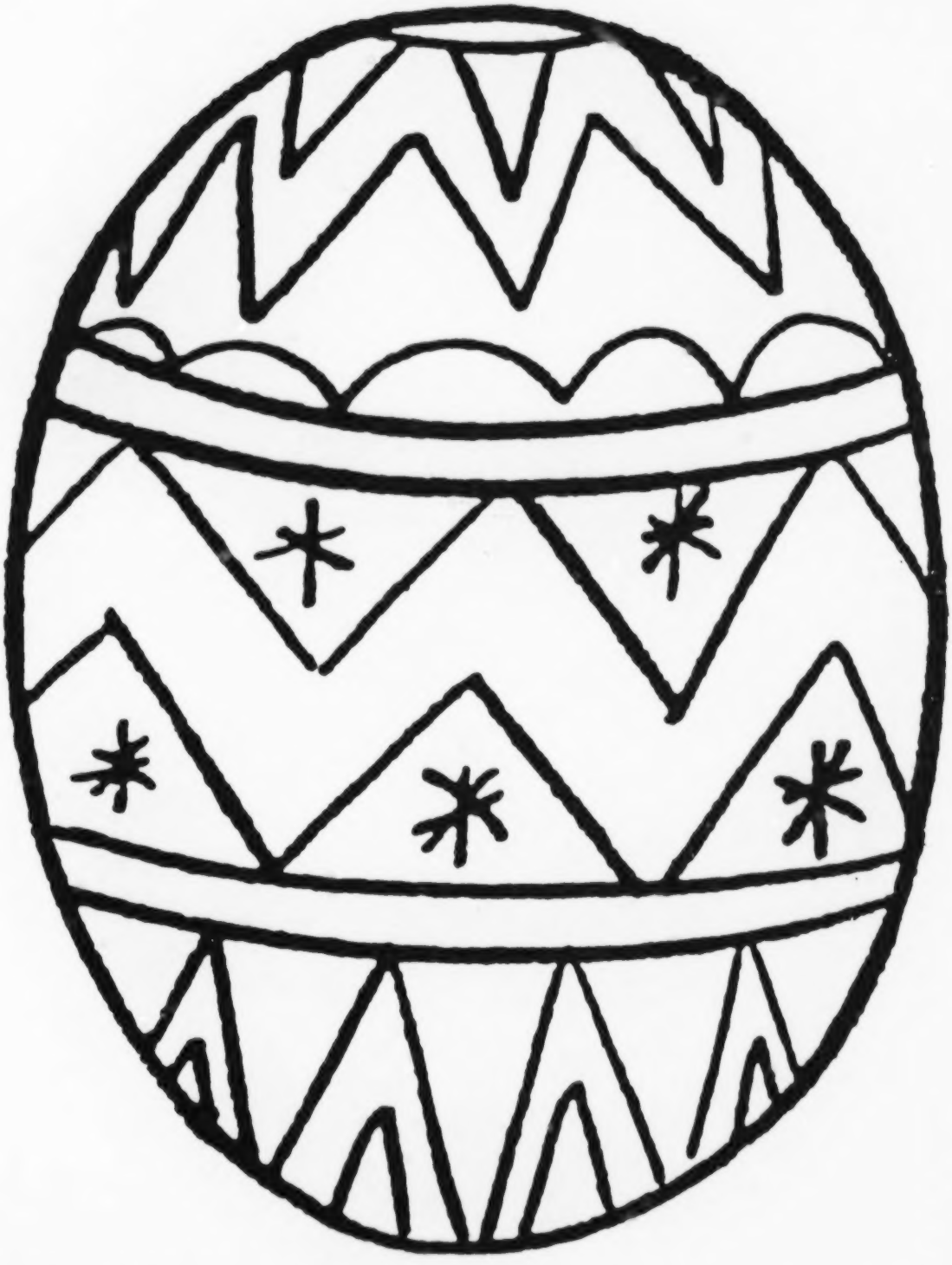
Coloring Task:

Using the student numbers, the teacher assigns each student a part of the egg to color.

Student #1 will do the top (one end), student #2 will do the middle, and student #3 will do the bottom of the egg (the other end).

The Easter Egg Mobile

After students finish, have them put the parts of their egg together and observe the results. The teacher may have students take a portion of the egg they made to new groups and put together new eggs. Completed group eggs can be displayed on a bulletin board or hung from the ceiling. This is accomplished by pasting one group's egg on the back of another group's egg and then hanging the result from the ceiling as a mobile.



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